DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 051 057 SO 001 355

TITLE	Vermont Design for Education.
INSTITUTION	Vermont State Dept. of Education, Montpelier.
PUB DATE	68
NOTE	31p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Improvement, Educational Objectives, *Educational Philosophy, *Educational Strategies, Elementary Grades, Improvement Programs, Individual Development, *Individualized Programs, Learning Processes, Public School Systems, School Community Relationship, Secondary Grades, *State Departments of Education, Statewide Planning, *Student Centered Curriculum, Student Teacher Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Vermont

ABSTRACT

Concepts set forth in this design represent the position of the State Department of Education and were developed in cooperation with lay and professional groups throughout Vermont. This statement of a working philosophy directs itself to the process of education with a main concern that an educational philosophy should center around and focus upon the individual, his learning process, and his relationship and interaction with the teacher. The handbook includes 17 specific statements related to this student-centered philosophy, and gives 13 possible activities which will help a school district move toward these goals. The design is to be used as a guide for improving learning opportunities in the public schools of Vermont through these implementation steps: 1) local district assessment of the elementary education program compared to concepts in the design; 2) local district development of guidelines for improving its educational program; and 3) calendar of commitment for implementation submitted by local district to State Department of Education. (Author/JSB)

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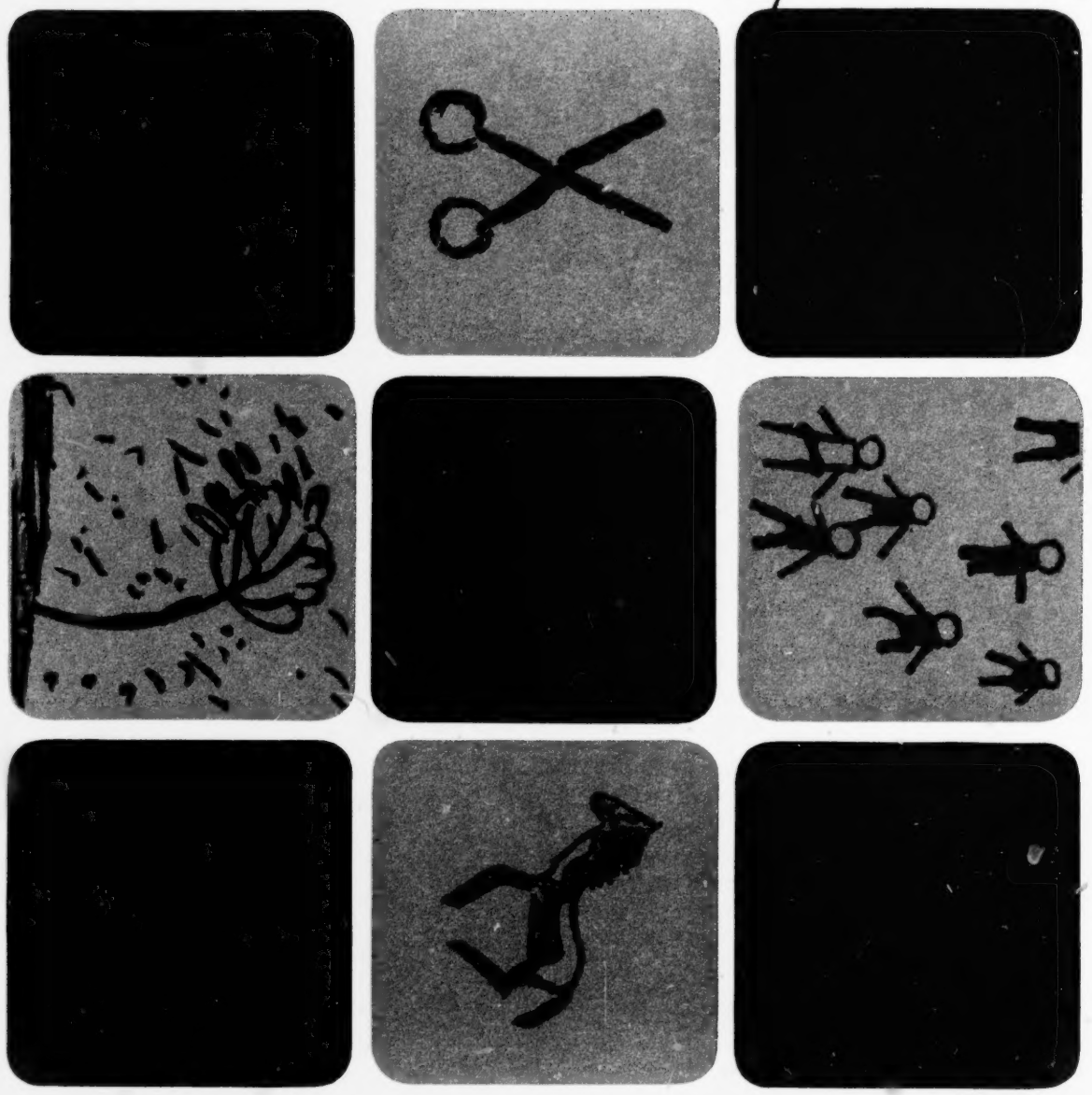
VERMONT design for EDUCATION



VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, MONTPELIER, VERMONT

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First Printing 1968
Fifth Reprint 1971

ED051057

STATE OF VERMONT

Governor — Deane C. Davis

State Board of Education — 1971

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VERMONT DESIGN FOR EDUCATION

THE CONCEPTS set forth in this Design represent the position of the State Department of Education, and were developed in cooperation with lay and professional groups throughout Vermont. This Design directs itself to the process of education, but supports the Seven Cardinal Principles of Education stated in 1918[1] — Health; Command of Fundamental Processes; Worthy Home Membership; Vocation; Civic Education; Worthy Use of Leisure; and Ethical Character.

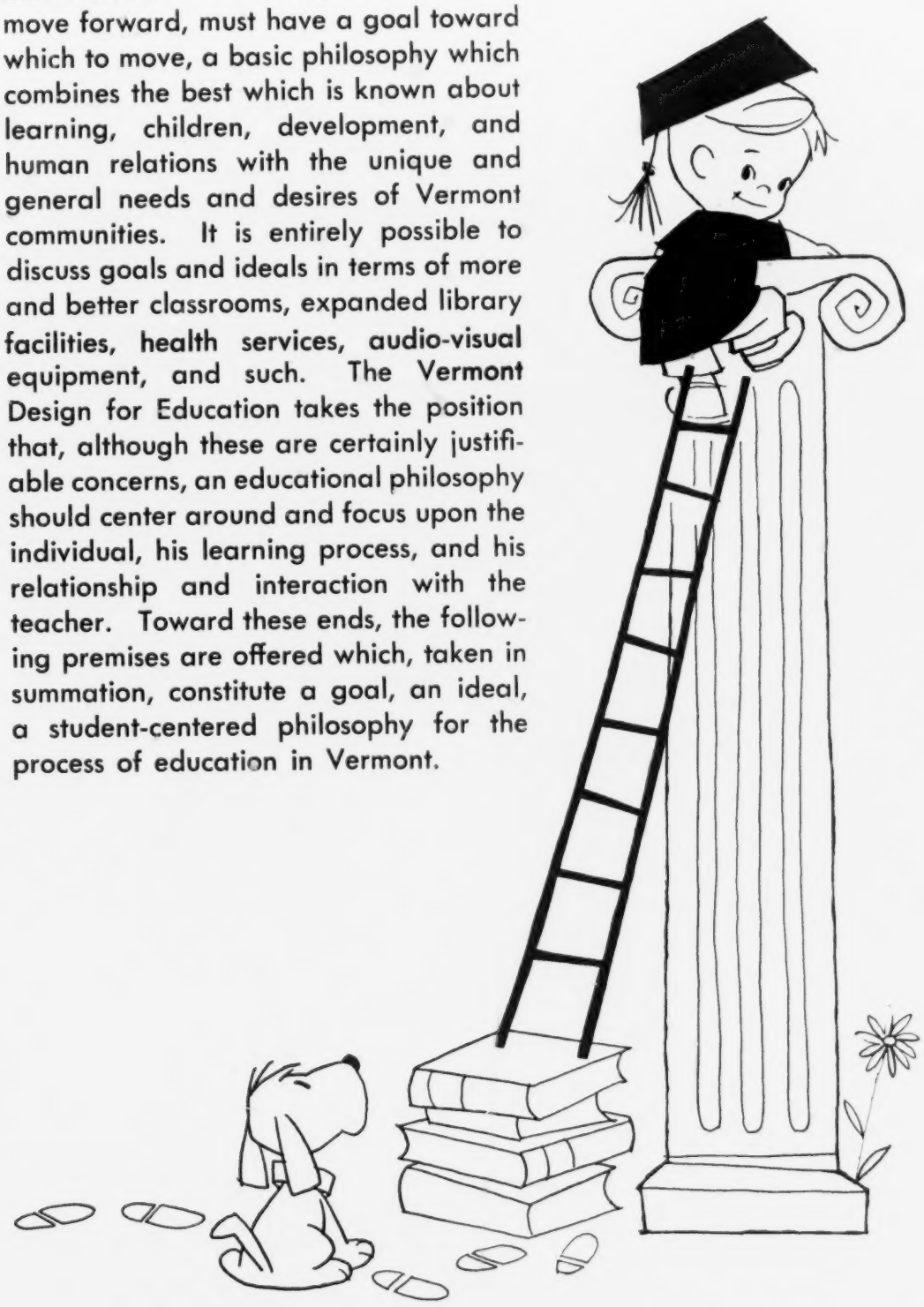
This Design is not to be taken as final, but should be reviewed periodically and be subject to change. Recommendations for improvement will be appreciated and should be directed to the Commissioner of Education, Montpelier, Vermont.

[1] Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, Appointed by the National Education Association, A Report of the Commission, **Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education,** Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1918, No. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962).

VERMONT

THE PROCESS FOR IMPROVED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

EDUCATION IN VERMONT, if it is to move forward, must have a goal toward which to move, a basic philosophy which combines the best which is known about learning, children, development, and human relations with the unique and general needs and desires of Vermont communities. It is entirely possible to discuss goals and ideals in terms of more and better classrooms, expanded library facilities, health services, audio-visual equipment, and such. The Vermont Design for Education takes the position that, although these are certainly justifiable concerns, an educational philosophy should center around and focus upon the individual, his learning process, and his relationship and interaction with the teacher. Toward these ends, the following premises are offered which, taken in summation, constitute a goal, an ideal, a student-centered philosophy for the process of education in Vermont.



1. THE EMPHASIS MUST BE UPON LEARNING, RATHER THAN TEACHING.

Education is a process conceived to benefit the learner. Central to any focus is the individual and how his learning process may be maximized.
This idea is basic and provides the foundation of all other elements of quality education.

2. A STUDENT MUST BE ACCEPTED AS A PERSON.

His feelings and ideas deserve consideration and his inquiries an honest response. He should have the right to doubt — he should even be encouraged to doubt with responsibility, to question, to discuss with teachers, textbooks authors and other authorities. He must, however, do more than doubt; he must strive to seek solutions to those issues which he questions. Each individual must be free to determine whether a position being advocated by an authority or another student is justifiable and rational.

3. EDUCATION SHOULD BE BASED UPON THE INDIVIDUAL'S STRONG, INHERENT DESIRE TO LEARN AND TO MAKE SENSE OF HIS ENVIRONMENT.

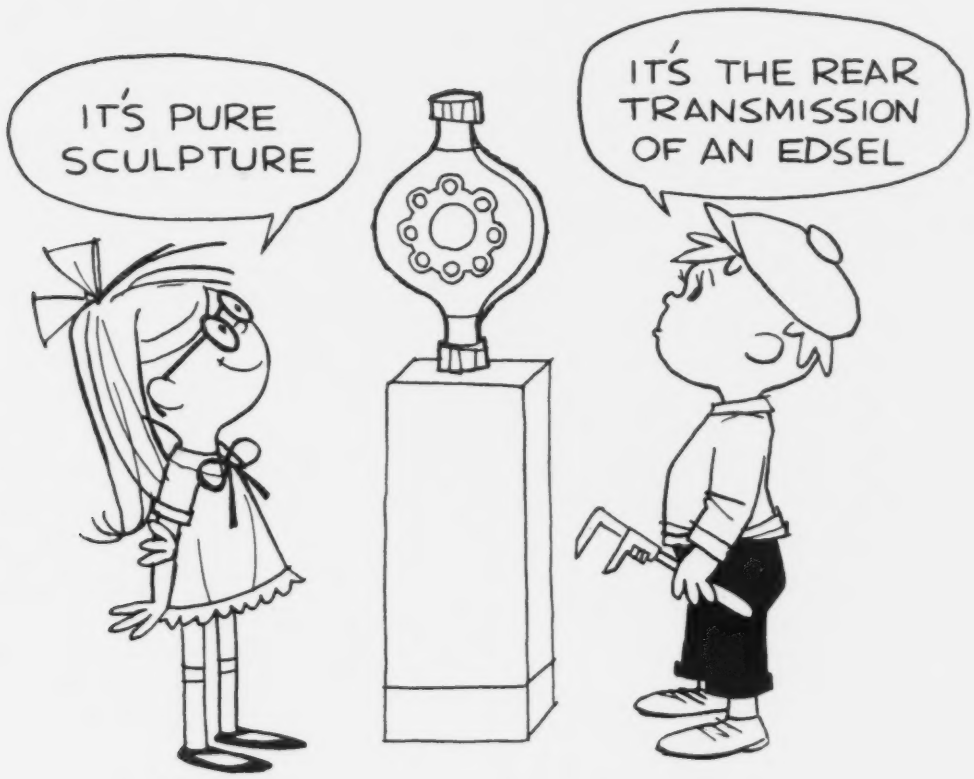
Desire to learn is accentuated when the experiences are stimulating and non-threatening. Learning about things is a natural part of a child's life, and in the process of growing up, the better part of learning is done independently.

The inherent motivation basic to this natural learning experience is internal, based upon a child's desire to answer a question, solve a problem, fill a gap in his knowledge, make things fit together, glimpse a pattern, or discover an order. When a child thus extends his knowledge, it is sufficiently rewarding in itself to make him happy to have learned and eager to learn more. This internal motivation must also become the basis for learning in the school situation. If school work is to absorb his interest, he must know something of its purpose. Involvement in planning and true decision making will help retain the initial enthusiasm with which a child enters school. The structure of the school must complement the natural way in which children learn.

4. ALL PEOPLE NEED SUCCESS TO PROSPER.

Youth is no exception. A continual series of failures, if experienced in the school, can lead to a negative self-image, loss of face, loss of desire to continue to participate, and an urge to seek this needed success outside of the school situation. A school situation should be flexible and divergent enough to allow each person regularly to find some measure of success.

5. EDUCATION SHOULD STRIVE TO MAINTAIN THE INDIVIDUALITY AND ORIGINALITY OF THE LEARNER.



The school's function is to expand the differences between individuals and create a respect for those differences.

6. EMPHASIS SHOULD BE UPON A CHILD'S OWN WAY OF LEARNING — THROUGH DISCOVERY AND EXPLORATION — THROUGH REAL RATHER THAN ABSTRACT EXPERIENCES.

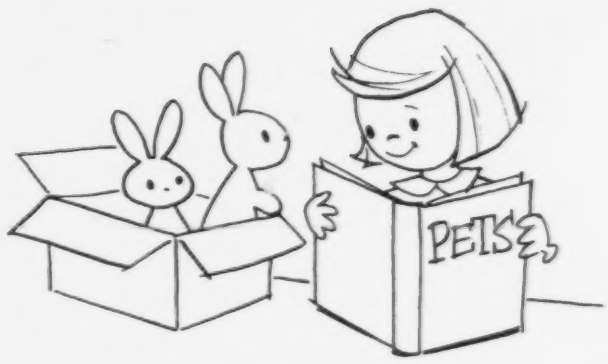
At no time in a person's life does one learn more or better than during early childhood. It is most revealing to watch a young child in this learning process — exploring, testing through trial and error, manipulating his environment, questioning, repeating.

The opportunity for this type of natural learning should be provided in schools. How much more meaningful for a pupil to be able to see the relationships in a numerical system expressed in concrete objects which he can manipulate to discover their interactions, rather than being faced with a set of numbers in an arithmetic textbook.

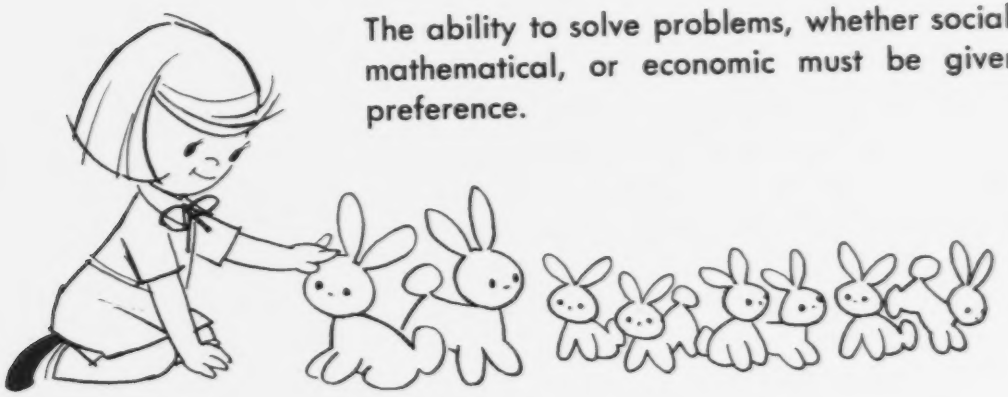
Compare the learning which can take place if a student can study trees in a wood lot, discover the interdependency of life in a pond, collect and analyze rocks, minerals, and soil from the surrounding area, rather than struggle through a series of charts and exercises in a workbook. Compare the meaning a student derives from involvement in the actions of a legislative committee with a textbook account of the same process.

7. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S THOUGHT PROCESS SHOULD BE PRIMARY.

Rote learning of facts should be de-emphasized — facts should become the building blocks for generalities and processes.



The ability to solve problems, whether social, mathematical, or economic must be given preference.

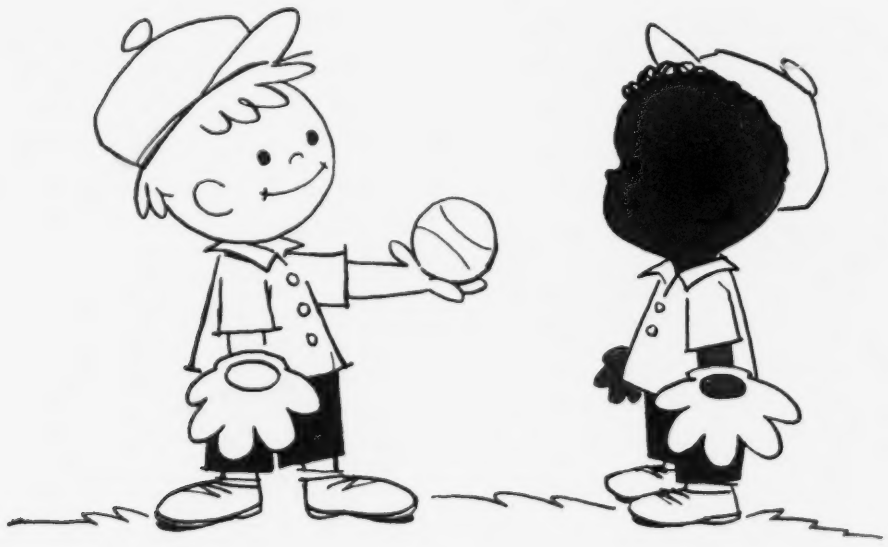


A person equipped to function adequately is able to relate his knowledge to new situations in order to solve new problems. He can use judgment and forethought — he is able to reason and imagine. Such a person can perceive problems as well as solve them.

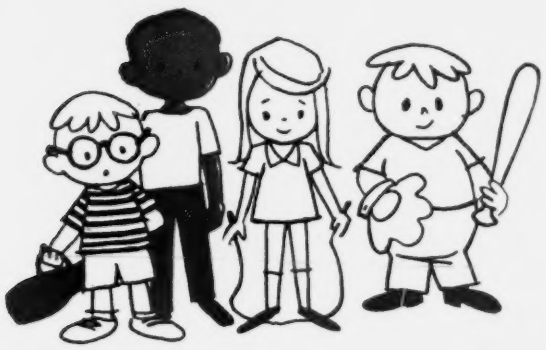
8. PEOPLE SHOULD PERCEIVE THE LEARNING PROCESS AS RELATED TO THEIR OWN SENSE OF REALITY.

There must be a conscientious effort to make the readings, discussions and issues faced in school relate to the world which people experience — to what they see when they look about and read the newspaper.

Schools cannot expect the trust and understanding of their students if agriculture is discussed in terms of the stereotype family farm, when these same students perceive around them huge agriculture combines and underpaid migrant labor.

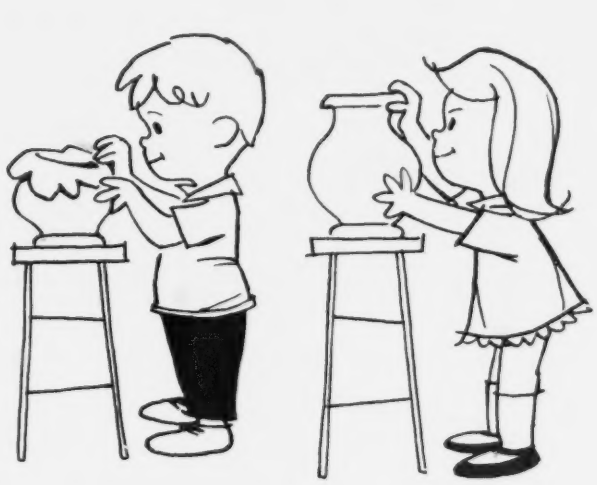


9. AN INDIVIDUAL MUST BE ALLOWED TO WORK ACCORDING TO HIS OWN ABILITIES.

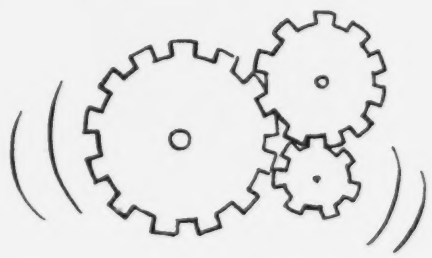


Students are as diverse intellectually as they are physically, having different backgrounds and experiences, feelings, ways of thinking, personalities, and ways of working and learning.

In order to be effective, schools must allow and encourage students to work at their own rate, to develop their own unique style of learning, conceptualizing and piecing together the parts to form coherent patterns.



Learning experiences must be geared to individual needs rather than group norms.



10. THE TEACHER'S ROLE MUST BE THAT OF A PARTNER AND GUIDE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS.

The role of the teacher must not be one of an imparter of knowledge, someone who knows all the answers and is never wrong, but rather one who possesses those skills necessary to establish an appropriate learning climate, both in atmosphere as well as equipment and materials. The teacher must constantly be aware of each person's abilities and accomplishments, lead that person from one level of conceptualizing to the next, from his immediate interests to a logical learning process, involve him in the planning and decision making process and allow him the freedom and responsibility of becoming deeply involved. The teacher must extend the student's horizons beyond the limitations of the in-

terests and abilities of the student, or even beyond those of the teacher. The teacher must help the individual realize what he has learned, and channel random discoveries into systematized learning.

The role of the teacher might be illustrated by the following example. Consider a child who expresses interests in whales through a freely created clay model. The teacher must be aware of the great number of learning experiences in which the child might become involved deriving directly from his self-expressed interest in whales.

These experiences might include numerical work through measuring, weighing, and developing of the ratios of various parts of the model to each other or in comparison to the real animal. Science, prediction and logical thinking can be involved through forecasting the model's daily loss in weight, questioning why this loss, what is lost, where it goes and in what form. Language development can be furthered through writing stories about one's own whale, or reading stories involving other whales, and research through exploration of different types of whales, their culture, classifications, habits and environment. The teacher must help the child determine which of these experiences would be most appropriate to move toward an individualized set of expectancies.

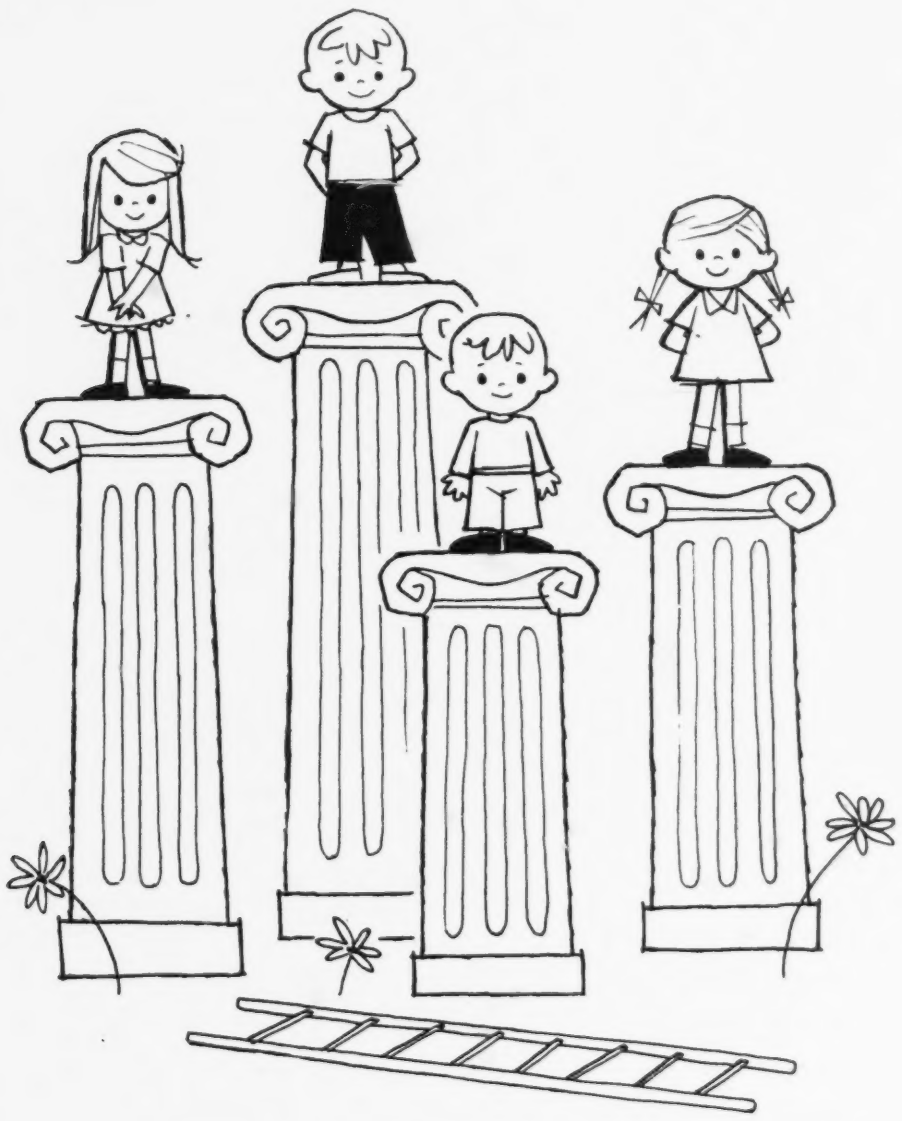
Consideration should be given to allowing students to set up their own course of study in a subject matter field if it is not relevant to a particular learning situation. For example, in the pursuit of knowledge in the field of chemistry, a student's needs might be better met through the development of a program acceptable to him and the teacher-counselor rather than the existing textbook-laboratory course.

The teacher does not abdicate his leadership role in the student-centered approach, but indeed assumes a far more important role of leadership, one responding to the individualized needs of each person with whom he works.

11. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY, A BASIC SET OF VALUES, IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT OF HUMAN ACHIEVEMENTS.

The school must assume an active role in helping each individual to evolve a set of personal values which will be most meaningful in helping him meet the challenges of life as a student and later as an adult. The teacher must not dictate a particular set of values or try to impose his own, but rather must help each person sort out his own experiences and seek a set of truths which can provide a tentative philosophy, one which can be re-evaluated in terms of further experiences and knowledge.

12. WE MUST SEEK TO INDIVIDUALIZE OUR EXPECTATIONS OF A PERSON'S PROGRESS AS WE STRIVE TO INDIVIDUALIZE THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR EACH PERSON.



Evaluations, based upon standardized expectancies, force students to adopt standardized learning in order to compete. Many of today's expectancies are influenced by publishing concerns and hardware vendors. We must develop personalized ways of assessing an individual's progress, his strengths and weaknesses, keeping in mind that the ultimate purpose of evaluation is to strengthen the learning process.

13. THE ENVIRONMENT WITHIN WHICH STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO LEARN MUST BE GREATLY EXPANDED.

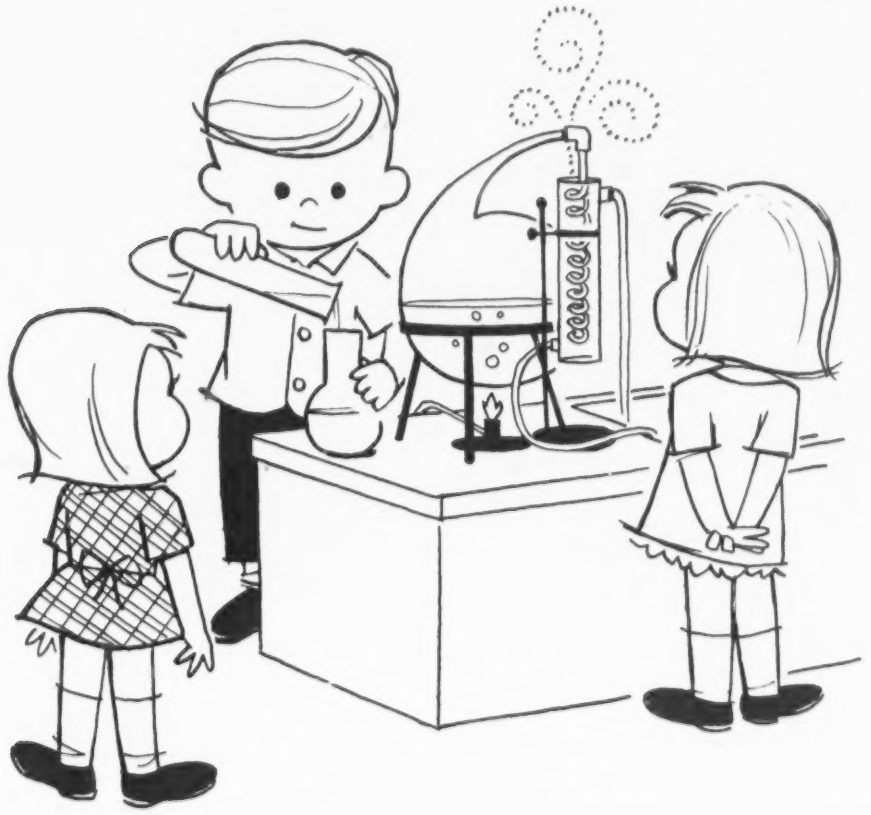
The classroom, or even the school, is an extremely limited learning environment.

The total culture surrounding each individual should become his learning environment. The surrounding parks, forests, lakes, homes, businesses, museums, factories should be as widely used as the resources of classrooms and libraries.

The wealth of personal talent in the community should be utilized. The talents, crafts, hobbies, travel experiences of persons of all walks of life should become resources for the learning process. Students should be encouraged to taste life, to become actively involved in the activities and the decision making processes of the community.

14. THE SCHOOL SHOULD PROVIDE A STRUCTURE IN WHICH STUDENTS CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.

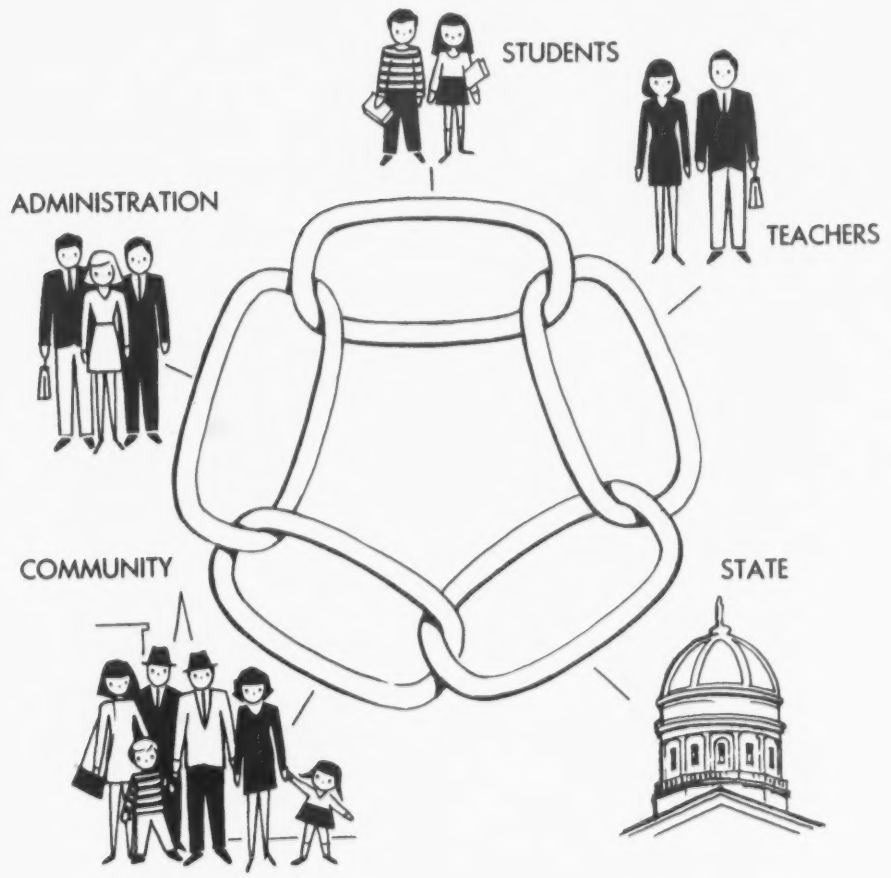
Much learning takes place naturally through association with peers or older siblings, and much of the motivation to learn and explore comes from this association. Students who have developed certain abilities can provide models for those less developed. Those engaged in some activity often provide the needed stimulus to interest others in becoming involved in that learning activity.



Schools should encourage students to work together cooperatively, to realize that individual efforts can often be improved through the combined effect of what each has to contribute to the common project.

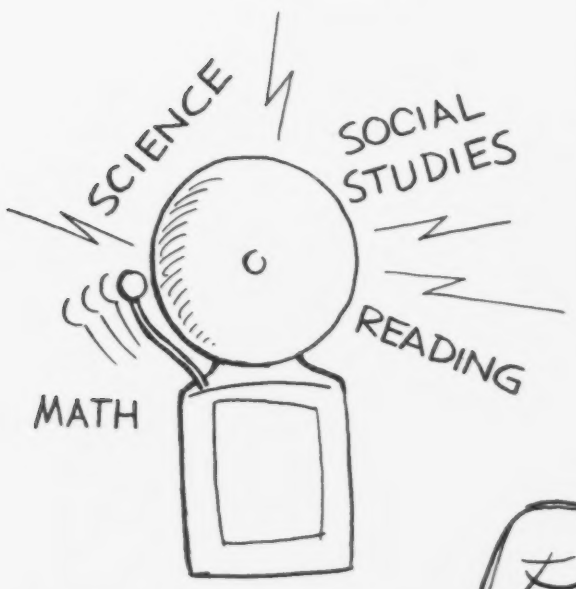
15. TO PROVIDE A MAXIMUM LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR ALL STUDENTS REQUIRES THE INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT OF THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY.

In order to make maximum use of available learning opportunities, students need the support and understanding of teachers, who in turn need the support of the school administration to allow students to operate effectively. The administration is responsible to the community and the State.



If any of the links in this chain operate independently and resist efforts to maximize learning for students through lack of understanding, the students themselves suffer. All parties must work cooperatively toward a common set of concepts and goals if students are to reap maximum benefit from the learning opportunities which should be theirs.

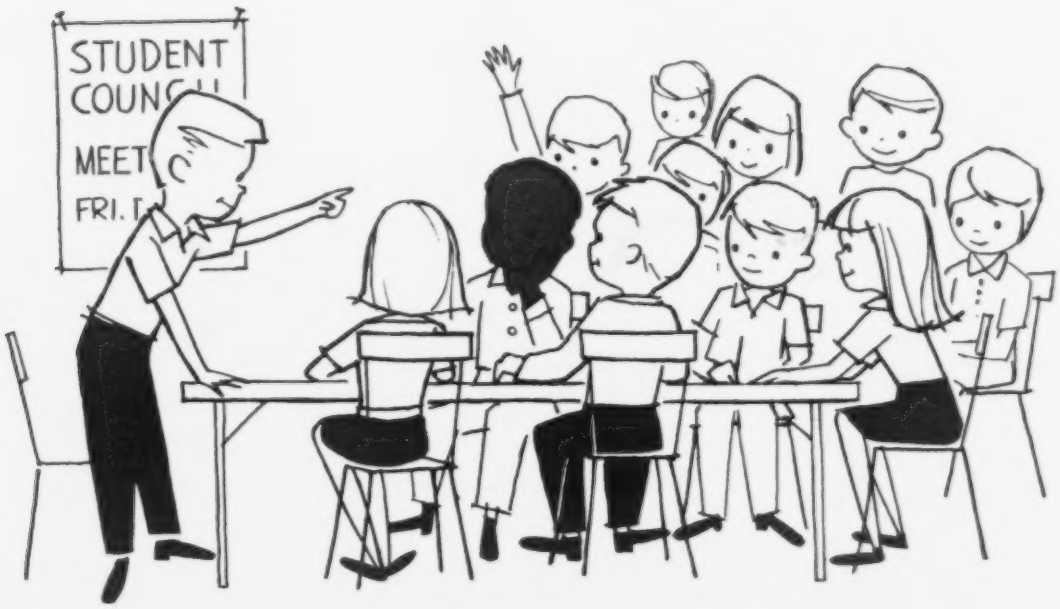
3. SCHOOLS SHOULD BE COMPATIBLE WITH REALITY. LEARNING WHICH IS COMPARTMENTALIZED INTO ARTIFICIAL SUBJECT FIELDS BY TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS IS CONTRARY TO WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE LEARNING PROCESS.



The interdependencies of real life which involve the combined use of a number of skills, should suggest a direction for school activities such as math, reading, science, social studies. It is unrealistic that math, or any subject, be limited to a certain period during the day, to be turned on and off by a bell.

How much more meaningful if math can be explored as one of a series of factors necessary to solving real problems as they arise during the course of the day. If we again look to the natural learning of preschool children as a model, it is apparent that they do not compartmentalize learning into neat little packages.

17. INDIVIDUALS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO DEVELOP A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY.

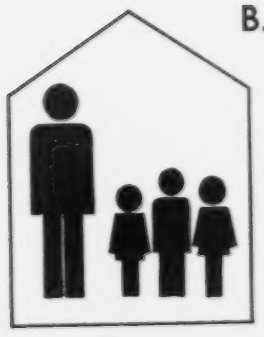


A student's school should be HIS school, one to be proud of. He should be actively involved in its direction, its maintenance, and its care. The attitude of belonging and being an important contributor can do much toward establishing a spirit of cooperation and respect. This sense of responsibility should be further developed to include peers and adults. It is vital that students realize other people are individuals with feelings, ideas which may conflict with their own, strengths, weaknesses, and problems. A sense of responsibility and respect for the individuality of each person is necessary for better understanding and cooperation.

VERMONT—SOME WAYS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROCESS FOR IMPROVED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

THE FOREGOING PHILOSOPHY should serve as a guideline for all activities directed toward the improved learning opportunities, as well as establishing priorities among the school's needs. Keeping the philosophy in the fore, the following are offered as possible activities which will help a school move toward its implementation.

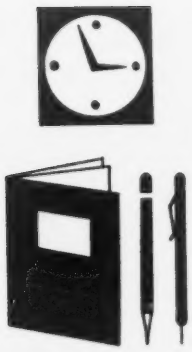
A. THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN IMPLEMENTING THESE IDEAS IS THE TEACHER, AND THE QUALITY OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE TEACHER AND LEARNER. Without a sympathetic and skillful teacher, most efforts of improving are doomed to failure. Teachers should be supported and involved in a number of ways — inservice training, workshops, individual consultant help, and the opportunity to visit and discuss other programs. These activities should strive to assist the teacher in understanding and accepting the basic concepts of the philosophy, and implementing them to provide the best possible learning situation for his students. It is possible, even desirable, that teachers interpret and implement these basic concepts in various ways to best suit their own traits, and the unique individuals, school and community which they serve.



B. TEACHERS WHO SEEM TO HAVE DEVELOPED TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE IN TERMS OF IMPLEMENTING THIS PHILOSOPHY SHOULD BE GIVEN INTENSIVE ASSISTANCE TO WORK IN MODEL OR DEMONSTRATION CLASSROOMS. It is vital to the development of teachers that they be able to visit and evaluate good examples demonstrating a particular concept, as well as observe teachers who have been able to work successfully with these ideas in situations similar to their own.

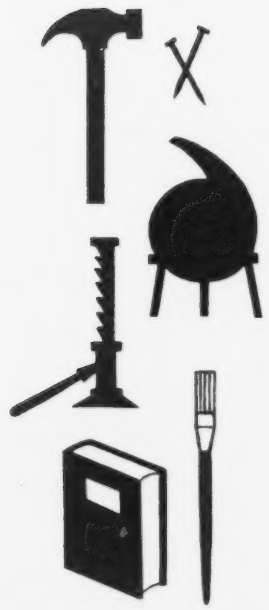
C. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT PRE-SERVICE COLLEGE STUDENTS BECOME CONCERNED WITH AND EVALUATE THESE IDEAS. If the students find these ideas appropriate, they should be given the opportunity to develop the necessary skills and attitudes to allow them to utilize effectively these methods upon beginning to teach. The process of working only with inservice teachers will be tremendously complicated if it must include those coming into teaching from our colleges each year.

Although it has been stated that the teacher and his interaction with students is primary, a teacher is powerless to work in accord with this philosophy if not supported by the school administration. This support must be provided.

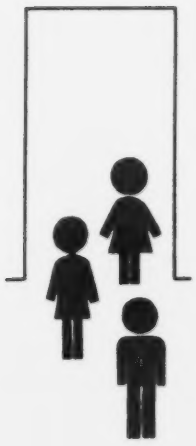


D. CURRICULUM GUIDES AND REQUIREMENTS SHOULD CONTAIN SUFFICIENT LATITUDE TO PROVIDE THE TEACHER THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET INDIVIDUAL NEEDS. To expect all individuals to complete or utilize certain prescribed texts and workbooks in the course of the year violates that which is known about the learning process.

E. THE DAILY SCHOOL SCHEDULE SHOULD BE RELATED TO THE MAXIMIZING OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES. Whenever possible, teachers should be allowed to develop an educational program according to the needs of their students without interference from bells or other scheduled interruptions. Every attempt should be made to provide flexibility, including the hours of attendance. Teachers must be free to allow individuals time to explore, create, work, and interact without being cut short by bells.

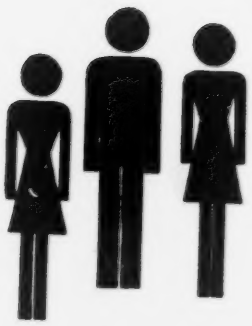


F. STUDENTS MUST BE PROVIDED WITH A STIMULATING ENVIRONMENT, CONSISTING OF A WIDE AND APPROPRIATE SELECTION OF CHALLENGING EQUIPMENT, MATERIALS, AND READING MATTER SUITED TO THEIR PARTICULAR INTERESTS AND ABILITY LEVELS. Equipment need not be particularly expensive or elaborate — often those items made by the teacher or students are best suited. The equipment should not be classified according to subject matter, such as math or science, but students should be allowed to develop and use equipment for a variety of purposes. Schools must be prepared to support teachers by providing at least a minimum of basic equipment and materials appropriate to encourage the kind of learning compatible with this philosophy.

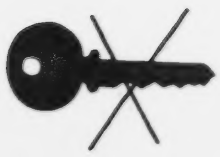


G. CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO PROVIDING A FLEXIBLE SCHOOL ENTRANCE SCHEDULE. Children should begin their school experience at varying times throughout the school year, rather than on the same magical day in September. This schedule might be arranged to allow children to enter school on a certain day of each month, on their birthday, or at the beginning of a quarter or term. Not only would this arrangement provide the opportunity to get children into school at the most appropriate time relative to learning, but would also compel teachers to individualize instruction rather than moving a class of children as a group. This step, however, is not realistic if a school is still operating within a graded framework.

H. ALMOST ANY SCHOOL FACILITY WHICH HAS ADEQUATE SPACE AND IS SAFE FOR CHILDREN IS COMPATIBLE WITH A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO LEARNING, ALTHOUGH SOME ARE MORE CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING THAN OTHERS. This factor becomes of particular concern when a new building or major addition is being contemplated. Flexibility should be the single most important consideration, with a maximum of space so designed to be utilized for a variety of activities.

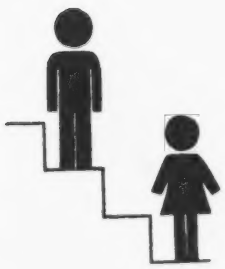


I. COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATION AMONG THE SCHOOL STAFF SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED. Communication can lead to a sharing and stengthening of ideas and a comparison of techniques, according to their strengths and weaknesses. Cooperation is vital in allowing teachers maximum flexibility through sharing duties and responsibilities.

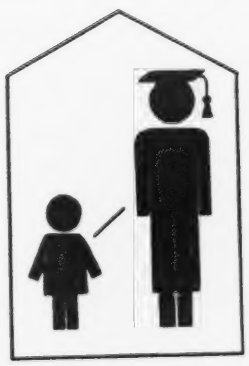


J. FOR A SCHOOL TO BE TRULY A CENTER FOR LEARNING, IT MUST BE REALIZED THAT INDIVIDUALS DO NOT CONFINE THEIR LEARNING TO THE WEEKDAY HOURS BETWEEN 8 A.M. AND 3:30 P.M. FROM SEPTEMBER TO JUNE. The school must work toward providing a learning center which is available to all persons, children through adults, into the evening hours, weekends and vacations. A student-centered approach may alleviate some of the biggest drawbacks to extended operation, in that students accept the responsibility to work independently, making a minimum of adult supervision necessary.

K. CREATIVE USE OF PARA-PROFESSIONALS CAN HELP FREE TEACHERS TO SPEND A GREATER PROPORTION OF THEIR TIME CONCERNED WITH LEARNING AND KNOWING THEIR STUDENTS. Providing the most beneficial learning situation is a full time activity for teachers. Those duties not essential to maintaining this learning situation, such as collecting milk money, mimeographing, or taking attendance, can only detract from a teacher's effectiveness.



L. THE CONTINUAL ASSESSMENT OF EACH STUDENT'S PROGRESS IS VITAL. THIS ASSESSMENT SHOULD BE APPROPRIATE TO HIS CAPABILITIES, DESIRES AND GOALS. Rather than categorize a student into one of a given series of groups, evaluation must describe his activities, strengths and weaknesses. Meaningful assessment should provide the basis of a teacher's work with each student.



M. THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION, TO UTILIZE MOST EFFECTIVELY AVAILABLE SPACE, TIME AND TALENT, MUST BE REORGANIZED. The K-12 organization is essential for the most efficient utilization of administrative time and talent, for the greatest assurance of articulation in the learning process from a child's entrance into school through graduation, and for the most economical appropriation of funds for the total educational program.

THE VERMONT DESIGN FOR EDUCATION will not emerge without a greater understanding of the need for a change in the role of the teacher — indeed, all people concerned with the education process. Programs have been developed in isolation and, with insufficient funds. In many instances, there has been insufficient effort for the coordination of appropriate activities related to improved learning opportunities. It is essential that all parties and agencies connected with education in Vermont develop a team approach toward its common goal — that of improving the learning opportunities for persons of all ages.

At first glance the educational philosophy described herein would appear a departure from that which is familiar to most people and certainly different from that practiced generally. However, a study of educational philosophy in general from Plato and Aristotle to Dewey and Piaget, and of the interpretation and implementation of an educational program based upon the concepts expressed in their writings, will give the reader a basis for understanding the strong foundation upon which this Vermont Design for Education is being developed.

It should be emphasized that acceptance of this philosophy and its implementation must be voluntary if there are to be improved learning opportunities in schools. No amount of legislation or administrative mandate will provide beneficial and permanent educational changes for students. However, for those systems and teachers interested in implementing appropriate program changes, there should be available financial and professional assistance. Such assistance can be provided by the various educational agencies cooperatively coordinating resources to this end.

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Printed by
QUEEN CITY PRINTERS INC.
Burlington, Vermont

COVER: Details from children's drawings from the Woodstock Elementary School under the supervision of Francis J. Gyra, Jr.